

To: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Public Safety
From: Elizabeth Wakefield, Staff Attorney
Date: 4/19/2023
Re: Support for SB 5532 and POPs 103 and 112 - Critical Investments in Juvenile Defense

Co-Chairs Sollman and Evans, and Members of the Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Public Safety:

My name is Elizabeth Wakefield. I am an attorney at Metropolitan Public Defender and a proud member of AFSCME Local 3668. I am a juvenile delinquency and dependency attorney. I urge your support of SB 5532 and the POPs. As a juvenile defense attorney, I specifically want to highlight the need for POP 103 to expand PCRCP and POP 112, which would designate legal representation in juvenile delinquency, juvenile dependency, and termination-of-parental-rights cases as a mandated caseload, that is, representation required by the state or federal constitutions or statutes or as a result of court actions.

I have been a juvenile delinquency and dependency attorney) for 20+ number of years. Through this work I help heal and reunite families. I represent teens who have experienced trauma and struggle with the juvenile justice system. I work in a PCRCP (Parent-Child Representation Program) county. PCRCP helps ensure attorneys have adequate time and resources to spend with their clients and on cases. We have reasonable caseloads, better compensation for attorneys than for attorneys in non-PCRCP counties, access to social work case managers who serve as part of the legal team, and enhanced support and oversight by OPDS.

With the PCRCP caseload expectations, I have more time to devote to each individual cases. I and my PCRCP case manager were able to assist a 17-year-old client with a serious and persistent mental illness signed up for SSI disability before he turned 18. This is a lifelong benefit that will help this young person for many years to come. This would not have been possible with the crushing caseloads that existed prior to PCRCP and COVID.

This would not be possible in the counties without PCRCP. The counties without PCRCP have much higher caseloads and do not have access to case managers. PCRCP should be implemented across the state to aid recruitment and retention of attorneys to this specialized advocacy.

I urge your support of SB 5532, the POPs, and especially POPs 103 and 112.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Wakefield, attorney (Multnomah, Yamhill, Polk)